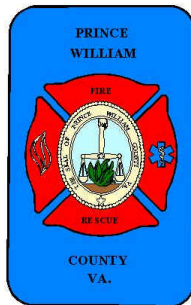


Elected Officials Guide To Disasters



**PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE
CHIEF MARY BETH MICHS**

JANUARY 2005

**Prince William County
Office of Emergency Management**

Introduction

Responding effectively to disasters requires a coordinated community-wide effort. As an elected official, you have a significant role in the County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and your response to disasters is an important part of the continuity of government in Prince William County. Your actions influence community members, as well as employees, and directly impact the County's ability to protect lives and property. This guide is designed to provide you information relating to your role during disasters and to help you make sound decisions.

The County's EOP clearly spells out how the various County agencies, individually and collectively, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. This integrated emergency management system is based on an "all-hazards approach" to dealing with disasters, which allows the County to manage disasters in a consistent way. It also provides an effective response for dealing with any type of disaster.

This guide has been developed for the Prince William County Board of County Supervisors for your use before and during disasters. The guide is divided into five main categories:

- Disaster Declarations
- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery
- Mitigation

This guide also includes a list of important phone numbers and tips for working with the media. If you have any questions or would like to learn more about emergency management, please contact Patrick Collins, the Coordinator of Emergency Management, at 703-792-5828.



Important Phone Numbers

Name	Number

Important Phone Numbers

County Executive: 703-792-6600

County Emergency Operations Center (EOC):

Disaster Manager 703-792-7020
Coordinator 703-792-7021

Communications Director: 703-792-6600

Health Department: 703-792-6300

Police: 703-792-6650

Fire & Rescue: 703-792-6800
703-792-6810

Utilities:

Cable: 703-730-2225

Electric:
Dominion Virginia 800-827-6937
NOVEC 703-355-0500

Gas:
Columbia Gas 800-544-5606
Washington Gas 703-750-1400

Telephone: 1-800-483-1000

Water:
PWCSA 703-355-7900
VA American Water 800-452-6863

Disaster Declarations



Local government has direct responsibility for the safety of its residents. State government has additional legal responsibilities for emergency response and recovery, and serves as the point of contact between local and federal governments. Federal government also has legal authorities and is a source of fiscal resources, as well as specialized personnel and equipment.

Specific areas of authority and responsibilities for emergency management are clearly stated in state law and local ordinances. These laws also provide a specific line of succession for elected officials and ensure continuity of government and leadership during an emergency. The County Attorney's Office provides legal guidance as needed throughout the process.

The Director of Emergency Management for Prince William County is the County Executive. The Coordinator of Emergency Management, Patrick Collins, serves under the operational control of the Director and coordinates emergency operations at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Several Deputy Coordinators have been identified and serve on a rotating schedule to ensure that staff is available around the clock.

In Prince William County, an emergency management coordinator is available 24/7 so that when an emergency occurs, appropriate resources are immediately activated. This coordinator communicates regularly with neighboring jurisdictions, as well as the state, to monitor conditions in the County and surrounding areas.

When conditions warrant, the EOC is activated and serves as the coordination point for the County's response. Working around the clock, staff from participating agencies coordinate response plans and develop plans for continuing actions until the event concludes.

There are a number of laws in the Code of VA that cover local emergencies and the declaration of a local emergency by a local jurisdiction. In general, Section 44-146.21 of the Virginia Emergency Services and Disaster Laws states:

- A local emergency may be declared by the local director of emergency management with the consent of the governing body of the political subdivision. If the governing body cannot convene, the director or in his absence, the deputy director, or in the absence of both the director and deputy director, any member of the governing body may declare the existence of a local emergency, subject to confirmation by the governing body at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting within 14 days of the declaration, whichever occurs first.
- A declaration of a local emergency activates the County's Emergency Operations Plan and authorizes aid and assistance in accordance with the plan.
- Whenever a local emergency has been declared, the director of emergency management may control, restrict, allocate or regulate the use, sale, production and distribution of food, fuel, clothing and other commodities, materials, goods, services and resource systems.
- The governing body, when in its judgment all emergency actions have been taken, shall take appropriate action to end the declared emergency.

The Declaration Process

- Step 1:** Conditions indicate a local disaster is likely to occur or has already occurred.
- Step 2:** Local Disaster declared by the Director of Emergency Management or his designee. This declaration must be ratified by the County Board of County Supervisors within 14 days.
- Step 3:** Director of Emergency Management requests a State Declaration.
- Step 4:** Governor requests a Presidential Declaration.

- Never argue with reporters or lose your cool. Don't be rude even if the interviewer or reporter appears to doubt your credibility.
- If you are interrupted, wait for the interrupter to finish and then proceed with your answer. You may wish to repeat the original question to bring the reporter back on track.
- Challenge any efforts to put words in your mouth. If you don't, you may end up appearing to agree with something you actually disagree with.
- Don't act evasive. Your evasiveness may be interpreted as an attempt to hide something.
- Be alert. Avoid answering speculative "what if" questions. Be prepared to lead the interview from problems and negatives to positive points you want to make.

Delivering your message:

- Speak naturally and avoid using "jargon" or terminology that isn't familiar to those working outside of emergency management.
- Say the most important thing first and then elaborate if necessary. Avoid long, rambling responses—be succinct and clear in your responses.
- Make one point at a time. Speak in simple sentences rather than compound sentences. During times of high stress people are generally only able to remember short, concise bits of information.
- If you must read a prepared statement, review the information before going "live." Read in a relaxed manner—avoid stilted, halting speeches.
- Be believable, personable and conversational. Credibility is vital to getting your message across.

Coordinating with the County:

- Coordinate any requests to tour the scene with the Incident Commander before making any promises to the media.
- Let the EOC PIO know if you talk to the media.

If you have questions concerning how to deal with the media, contact the County's Communications Office at 703-792-6600 or call the EOC PIO at 703-792-7020.

Media Guide



According to the EOP, the County's Communications Director will serve as the Public Information Officer (PIO) whenever the EOP is activated. Members of the Communications Staff will assist the PIO in the dissemination of information and will coordinate all media relations. During a disaster, all media requests should come through the PIO and Communications Staff first. We have staff who are constantly in contact with the media and it's important for everyone to give consistent information. The on-scene Incident Commander or Communications Director can help and staff can be with you during an interview.

If you cultivate good relationships with the media prior to an emergency, you'll get better support from the media during the hectic hours of responding to an emergency. You want to create a situation where the media feels it has a vital role during the response efforts. The media, when supportive, can convey important information to the public about issues such as evacuations and disaster-assistance information.

Tips for Working with the Media in a Disaster

Responding to questions:

- Answer all questions directly and as completely as possible.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Don't risk a guess. Erroneous information can cause the public to take incorrect actions and can damage your credibility. Ask the reporter to leave his or her name and telephone number so that you can provide an answer.
- Do not exaggerate the facts. Give facts as you know them and cite your own sources. In an emergency or disaster, the information you reveal could threaten lives if it is incorrect.
- Tell the truth and avoid using "no comment." No comment gives the impression that you have something to hide.
- Never give "off the record" information—it could come back to haunt you.

Preparedness



Preparedness involves activities that are done before a disaster, such as training, planning, community education and exercises. To be prepared, you should have plans and supplies for both your home and your workplace.

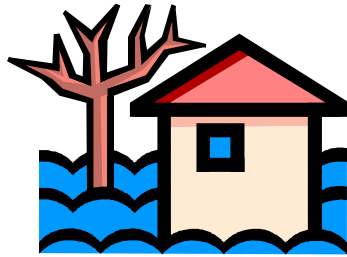
- Make sure you have developed an adequate emergency preparedness plan for you and your family. The Office of Emergency Management will provide a disaster preparedness information package to help you plan.
- Discuss emergency preparedness with your staff.
- Have water, nonperishable food and other supplies on hand to be able to be self-sufficient for 72 hours.
- Have all important phone numbers you may need readily available. Include critical community leaders you may want to contact during an event.
- Make sure your personal vehicle is ready to go (chains, tires, full tank).
- Get a briefing on preparedness activities from the appropriate County official. The Director of Emergency Management will provide all board members regular updates during the incident.
- Decide ahead of time where you want to be during the event.
- Attend training. You are invited to attend any of the programs offered through the County and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). Training also is available online from the Emergency Management Institute through an Independent Study program at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/>. Selected information that is designed for elected officials is provided in your disaster preparedness packet.

Response

The scenes of disasters and emergencies involve significant risks to your safety and welfare. Natural disasters, such as floods, involve contaminated flood water and debris that can produce a myriad of slipping and falling hazards. Major fires produce smoke, toxic atmospheres and the possibility of structural collapse. Hazardous materials events usually involve toxic materials that can cause numerous types of health hazards. Terrorism threats can involve chemical, biological, radiological or explosive devices.

We recommend that you do not respond to disaster scenes because of safety concerns for you as well as emergency responders working at the scene. However, if you do choose to respond to the scene, we ask that you follow these guidelines:

- The Fire and Rescue Department or Police Department will establish a “Hot Zone” where only persons with the proper protective clothing and training are allowed to enter due to hazards to health and safety. Be prepared to follow their guidance and understand that if you are denied access it is for your safety.
- Park your car in a safe place away from the incident and in an area where your vehicle does not obstruct the road. Blocked roads may slow emergency vehicles from reaching their destination.
- Always respond upwind and uphill.
- Report to the Incident Commander as soon as you arrive at the scene. This person is responsible for directing all activities at the incident scene. The Incident Commander should be located at the Command Post, which is designated with a green flashing light.



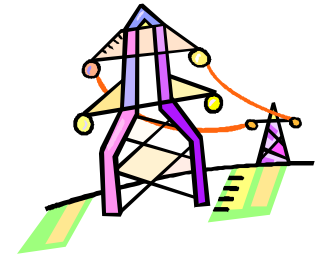
Mitigation

Mitigation is defined as taking sustained actions to eliminate long-term risk to people and property from hazards and their effects. It is often called the cornerstone of emergency management, but it can also be the most difficult concept to understand.

The primary goal of mitigation is to reduce the impact of natural hazards on our residents and property. Mitigation activities are undertaken to protect people and structures and to reduce the cost of response and recovery. For example, maintaining strong building codes can reduce property damage from storms, and storm water management initiatives can minimize flooding risks.

As part of our mitigation strategy we have identified the following mitigation priorities:

1. Identify existing and potential mitigation projects.
2. Look for funding support that can be used for identified mitigation projects.
3. Pursue mitigation projects that improve the resiliency of our critical infrastructure.
4. Compile a list of the high-risk areas in each magisterial district.
5. Examine measures to help reduce power outages during disasters. Both Dominion Virginia Power and NOVEC have generator programs that provide generators to home owners at reasonable prices.
6. Continue outreach to the critical communities that are at risk during disasters.



During the recovery phase the County may be able to provide:

- Drinking water
- Food
- Shelter
- Emergency medical transport

But we normally do not provide:

- Batteries
- Flashlights
- Ice
- Generators
- Sandbags

These items can typically be purchased through retail establishments. If you receive questions from your constituents about ice, you may want to refer them to the phone book where vendors are listed under the heading of “Ice.” Generators and sand bags may be available from hardware stores, equipment supply companies and equipment rental businesses. During disasters, stores that sell generators and other emergency supplies will likely run out. In some cases, when there is a severe shortage, the Office of Emergency Management may be able to make temporary arrangements to supplement local resources. However, it is best for residents to have enough basic supplies on hand so that they can be on their own for 72 hours.

FEMA’s role in providing individual assistance involves assisting citizens in filling out paperwork to get a low-cost loan from the Small Business Administration, providing temporary housing in the form of trailers, and providing some grants to replace items not covered by insurance.

One of the most important contributions that elected officials can make is to point your constituents in the right direction for the information they need — that might be to a FEMA tele-registration number or a disaster field office, or there may be a need for volunteers to help with debris removal or other cleanup activities. If you have a constituent who has a special need for items or services, contact the EOC or the Emergency Management Coordinator at 703-792-5828.

- Pay attention to your surroundings. Many responders are struck by cars every year because they are operating in the roadways where drivers are easily distracted by the disaster or incident.
- Watch where you step. The scene may contain hazardous materials that can wind up on your shoes, which in turn can wind up in your car, home or business. Do not walk into or touch spilled material. Avoid inhaling fumes, smoke and vapors. Avoid flood water; it may be contaminated.
- Wear the right type of clothing and protective equipment. Sturdy steel-toed boots, a hardhat, and even safety glasses might be needed. Showing up at a disaster in the wrong type of clothing can place you at risk. If you do not have the proper equipment, let the Incident Commander know and the scene Safety Officer will make the appropriate clothing available for you to wear.
- Remember, the scene of a terrorism act is an area where someone intended to harm people; it is also a crime scene.

During a disaster, you are likely to receive calls from your constituents. Through these conversations you may be able to collect information from residents and businesses that you can funnel to the right agency or department for action.

It is up to everyone to help manage public expectations about what government can or cannot provide during or after a disaster. It is helpful when you reassure constituents that the County government is still functioning and ensure them that we will work very hard to get back to normal as quickly as possible.

Recovery

Recovery involves all of the cleanup activities that are necessary to be able to return the area to normal. This involves getting all of the damage repaired, utilities restored and the debris cleaned up. Recovery is often the hardest part of the response to disasters and may continue for an extended time. As soon as it is safe to do so, the County government will conduct preliminary damage assessments to determine the level of property damage and the parts of the critical infrastructure that may be damaged.

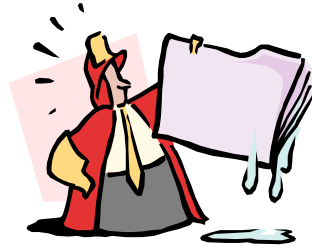
During the recovery phase you may find it helpful to get briefings from County staff on the extent of damage and status of the recovery process. Estimates on the extent of damage in your magisterial district will be available through this briefing process.

The County's priority for service is the same as the state and the federal government:

1. Life Safety
2. Critical Facilities (Systems)
3. Property Damage

Residents have their own priorities which may be different than those of the County. For example, a resident may have a tree that has been blown down in their backyard as a result of a storm and they want it cleared right away. The tree is not causing any hazards to life safety or critical systems, and therefore is not considered a very high priority for the County. Residents are often unaware of the scope of a disaster and may have unrealistic expectations about what local government can do for them as everyone works to recover.

Some of the biggest issues that occur after the disaster involve the following:



- **Debris Removal:** Debris removal on private property is typically not covered by FEMA or the County and is the property owner's responsibility. If you have a constituent who has a significant problem with debris removal, call the EOC or the County Emergency Management Coordinator. We may be able to find ways to help.
- **Sandbags:** Constituents may not understand why we cannot provide sandbags. The number of bags and amount of sand required to adequately protect a home is really more than most people understand and far exceeds our resources. For example, to build a one-foot-high wall that is 100 feet long out of sandbags requires 800 sandbags and 13 tons of sand. The storm surge up the Potomac River during Hurricane Isabel was over eight feet in some areas.
- **Rebuilding:** Residents may want to rebuild their house or business in the flood plain. This brings up zoning issues and County ordinance issues.
- **Response Time:** Residents may think that government is slow to respond. It typically takes the federal government at least 72 hours to respond to a local emergency.
- **Public Information:** Residents may report difficulty getting critical information about the disaster from the news media. Despite our efforts to communicate through the media by issuing regular news releases, local media often choose to edit the information significantly, which can make it inaccurate, or not use it at all in their reports. However, we are continuing our efforts to foster positive working relationships with all facets of the media. This is done in a myriad of ways, including media briefings and polling media to see how they want to receive information, so that they will use the information in their reports. These positive relationships are critical during times of disasters, and the Communications Staff is working diligently to ensure information is getting to our residents.